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ABSTRACT

What has been called bilingual education in this country presently has as its sole concern the linguistic performance of the student, thereby neglecting the implementation of a coherent conceptual system which takes into consideration the ways in which the student comes to understand the world around him. Furthermore, bilingual education has not been defined as a collective effort for the communication of sound teaching strategies and techniques for the bilingual and potentially-bilingual student; and it has not come to grips with the assessment procedures which are geared to the actual teaching/learning situation. This paper argues that we must not allow the designation of bilingual education as solely a temporary measure, to be utilized until the student is capable of receiving instruction in English; making no effort to maintain and enhance his command of the native language. To succeed, indeed, to survive, it must also be recognized as beneficial to the English-speaking majority as well as to the other language groups which form such a significant part of our society. Obviously a valid system of bilingual education demands pervasive change throughout the educational system, in the attitude of society, in government policy, and in the economic priorities of the state. (Author/AM)

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NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION

by

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With the passage of the Bilingual Educat on Act, Title VII of ESEA, bilingual education became a national reality in 1968, triggering programmatic activity in this educational process throughout the country. This act recognizes the needs and strengths of children with limited English speaking ability in our schools and provides funds for the implementation of bilingual education programs. Since its enactment, other federal and state legislation has been passed to broaden the scope and extent of bilingual education.

Recent Supreme Court and lower federal court decisions have buttressed the position taken by Congress by mandating that local governments have the responsibility to provide bilingual education for pupils who cannot understand instruction in English.

That this is significant and historic progress cannot be denied. But before we become too congratulatory, we must see it for what it is: Steps in a journey, not arrival at the destination.

No matter where we go in the USA and its territories to look at bilingual programs, we will find that, if not all, the vast majority are funded principally with Title VII monies. The location and linguistic orientation of federally-funded programs has reflected the concentration of Spanish-speaking peoples in the USA. Such program reach the greatest density in Texas and California, followed by New York. But the differences between Texas, California, New York, Florida, Illinois, or wherever are not distinct enough to merit a detailed contrast. The most significant albeit rare aspect of these programs is the inclusion of English-speaking students not readily identifiable on the basis of ethnicity in the class composition. When this occurs, it elevates the potential of bilingual education from the position of remediation for some to enrichment for all. This, I believe is as it should be; indeed, as it must be.

In the fiscal year 1974-75, $68 million was appropriated to fund 380 bilingual projects throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and trust territories. Forty-two languages were involved, twenty-three of them Indian. For the fiscal year 1975-76, there will be $85 million spent for bilingual education.

However, the current Title VII guidelines seem to favor the relegation of bilingual education to a compensatory role; to wit, from the 1975-76 guidelines:

> "(1) A program of bilingual education may make provision for the voluntary enrollment to a limited degree therein, on a regular basis, of children whose language is English, in order that they may acquire an understanding of the cultural heritage of the children of limited English-speaking ability for whom the particular program of bilingual education is designed. In determining eligibility to participate in such programs, priority shall be given to the children whose language is other than English. In no event shall the program be designed for the purpose of teaching a foreign language to English-speaking children.
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> "(2) In such courses or subjects of study as art, music, and physical education, a program of bilingual education shall make provision for the participation of children of limited English-speaking ability in regular classes."

Compare this, if you will, to the prior guidelines:

"(3) Children whose dominant language is English and who attend schools in the project area should be encouraged to participate, and provision should be made for their participation in order to enhance the bilingual and bicultural aspects of the program.

"The number of monolingual English-speaking participants will depend upon various factors including the size of the project, the present school enrollment ratio of these students to children whose dominant language is not English, and the degree of parent and student interest in the program.

"Under no circumstances should children whose dominant language is not English be segregated for the entire school day for purposes of classroom instruction when monolingual English-speaking children attend schools in the project area. However, a limited period of grouping for specific instructional activities is not precluded."

We may conclude that initially the federal guidelines emphasized the desirability of integrating English monolingual students into bilingual classes with students from the identifiable ethnolinguistic group to be served.

Bilingual education, as promulgated today by these major funding patterns, is more a political effort than the sound educational process it should be. I am not implying that bilingual education as a transitional measure is altogether wrong. I am simply stating that this is not all there is to it, and furthermore, it cannot be looked upon as a panacea to cure all the ills of our educational system. The major contribution in these past five years of funding has been

the creation of some materials and the training of personnel to carry out programmatic activity. The decision seems not to have been reached as to whether we are programming to phase out the whole process or to capitalize on its initial accomplishments.

We must remeber that the theory of intervention or compensatory education as usually stated in the 1960's, reasoned that a large number of children from impoverished homes were failing in school because they were growing up in a "disadvantaged" or "deprived eivironment which did not provide the stimuli necessary for academic success.

According to T.P. Carter (Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect, 1970) this theory underlying compensatory education inplies that certain nurturing cultures do not provide the necessary influence to make children successful in school or acceptable in the major society. It is further implied that the principal role of the school is to act as the first in a chain of influences which will cause "disadvantaged" children to accept middle-class culture. It is the school's function in society to reeducate these children. Also implicit is the assumption that the school is essentially satisfactory as it now exists and that it is a valid representation of American culture. Thus the theories underlying compensatory education and the two variants of the melting-pot theory clearly and mutually reinforce the conception of each that something about the child is wrong and that the school represents the cultural standart to which all must conform.

We must not perpetuate these false assumptions which influence teacher expectations and parental attitudes. If reshaping is to take place, it must be the school, the most visible social institution in the community, institutions of higher learning, and educational policy makers that change, not the student.

If languages other than English are viewed as the disease of the poor or disadvantaged, it is futile to treat them with superficial exposures to their languages, as in the process of building up a natural immunity. This ultimately leads to the eradication of these languages, and realistically there are other, more drastic but less expensive treatments to cure the use of a native tongue. If the goal is to be an English-only policy, one should never refer to the means by which it is achieved as bilingual education. Are we committed to the perpetuation of the fallacy, or are we ready to reexamine the concept?

To summarize: What has been called bilingual education in this country presently has as its sole concern the linguistic performance of the student, thereby neglecting the implementation of a coherent conceptual system which takes into consideration the ways in which the student comes to understand the world around him. Furthermore, bilingual education has not been defined as a collective effort for the communication of sound teaching strategies and techniques for the bilingual and potentially bilingual student; and it has not come to grips with assessment procedures which are geared to the actual teaching/learning situation.

It is the apex of American ethnocentrism to look upon the linguistically different student solely as a "language problem." He or she must be considered as a total student with the strength of having learned a language and the potential for becoming bi- or even multilingual. We must not allow the designation of bilingual education as solely a temporary measure, to be utilized until the student is capable of receiving instruction in English; making no effort to maintain and enhance his/her command of the native language.

Moreover, the unrealistic time-frames designed by well-intentioned administrators in order to get competetive soft money for program implementation have maximized this distortion. Far too often third graders have been pre-tested, usually with irrelevant standardized tests, in November, with the hypothesis that by the time for post-testing in May they will have advanced two years in reading. This is the consequence of a pattern of funding based primarily, if not exclusively, on a very narrow interpretation of gain. The total person is ignored. Are we assessing human development or products on an assembly line?

There is no doubt that large numbers of disadvantaged students, the consequences of whose need is most apparent, lack facility in English. For these students, there is no question that their educational process must not be further delayed or minimized and that they must be taught most subjects in their native tongues while systematically acquiring English as a second language. If we carefully examine the Lau Decision in San Francisco, the Consent Decree between ASPIRA and the New York City Board of Education, and many other cases in which the courts have ruled in favor of the student of limited English speaking ability, we will see that, while they help segments of the student population in dire need to some extent, this is not enough. Bilingual education, placed in the compensatory category (I am referring to transitional programs) can best be described as an attempt to "patch up," but it will never give us the quilt.

In any analysis of the rationale behind bilingual cross-cultural education in the USA, we must distinguish between the political pressures which have left their imprint on the movement and the pedagogical and sociological bases which would justify acceding to these pressures. In the past decade (1965-75), most of the pressures for language maintenance programs have been brought to bear

by minority groups. As examples, one may consider the roles played by Spanish-speaking voters in promoting bilingual education programs in New York City and the Southwest. These last ten years are unique in our history, since the language issues has finally moved into the arena of social issues/social needs.

Also in the past decade, the heightened conciousness of ethnicity has caused other languages and other cultures to be viewed as worthy of maintenance and enhancement. Those of us who strongly advocate this principle must categorically deny bilingual education for compensatory and transitional purposes.

There is a chronic state in which the individual, when society fails to incorporate him/her, becomes alienated from it. He or she then exists in a condition of anomie. No less personally affecting but even stronger in consequences, when a group loses its bond of language or culture through repression by the larger society or lack of knowledge of the option of maintenance, this condition of disorientation, anxiety, and isolation can reach epidemic proportions. Normative standards become weak or lacking; and society is reciprocated for its inaccesibility with widespread social ills. The remedy lies in pluralism, which, pervading society, can lead to a constructive individual and group conciousness that prevents anomie as it promotes social integration.

While I am not without questions as to the future of bilingual education, I am convinced that to succeed, indeed, to survive in this country, it must be recognized as beneficial to the English-speaking majority as well as to the other language groups which form such a significant part of our society. Compensatory education promoted as bilingual education will not solve the problems of the English language learners; neither will it meet their basic educational needs. But is the United States ready for bilingual education as enrichment? Or will we and our colleagues in the field of education reject the concept

because of personal inadequacies and biases?

Finally, after all these comments, you may ask, "How can we attain that which you describe as bilingual education 'for the enrichment of all and not as remediation for some'?" Only through a cohesive effort on the part of those of us who care to change, at school, district, state, and federal levels, educational policy wherein decision-makers continue to isolate bilingual education as a linguistic phenomenon, a tool to be employed for quick assimilation.

It is obvious that a valid system of bilingual education demands pervasive change throughout the educational system, in the attitude of society, in government policy, and, last but certainly not least, in the economic priorities of the state.

These changes must begin in the classroom: teachers and learning situations, curricula and materials, the time spent in school must insure mutual understanding among the students, the school, and the community. We will not achieve these goals merely by translating curricula into Albanian, Chinese, French, Greek, or Spanish, or while ignoring the socio-economic milieu in which the student lives within and outside of the classroom. If the school is to become an instrument of social change, it must advance the concept of a pluralistic society; a society in which future generations will be able effectively and truly to communicate. We cannot afford to continue the practice of isolating students into social cubicles, but must bring them instead into an arena in which they may interact, a forum in which them may learn, a point of debarkation for meaningful, productive adult lives.